

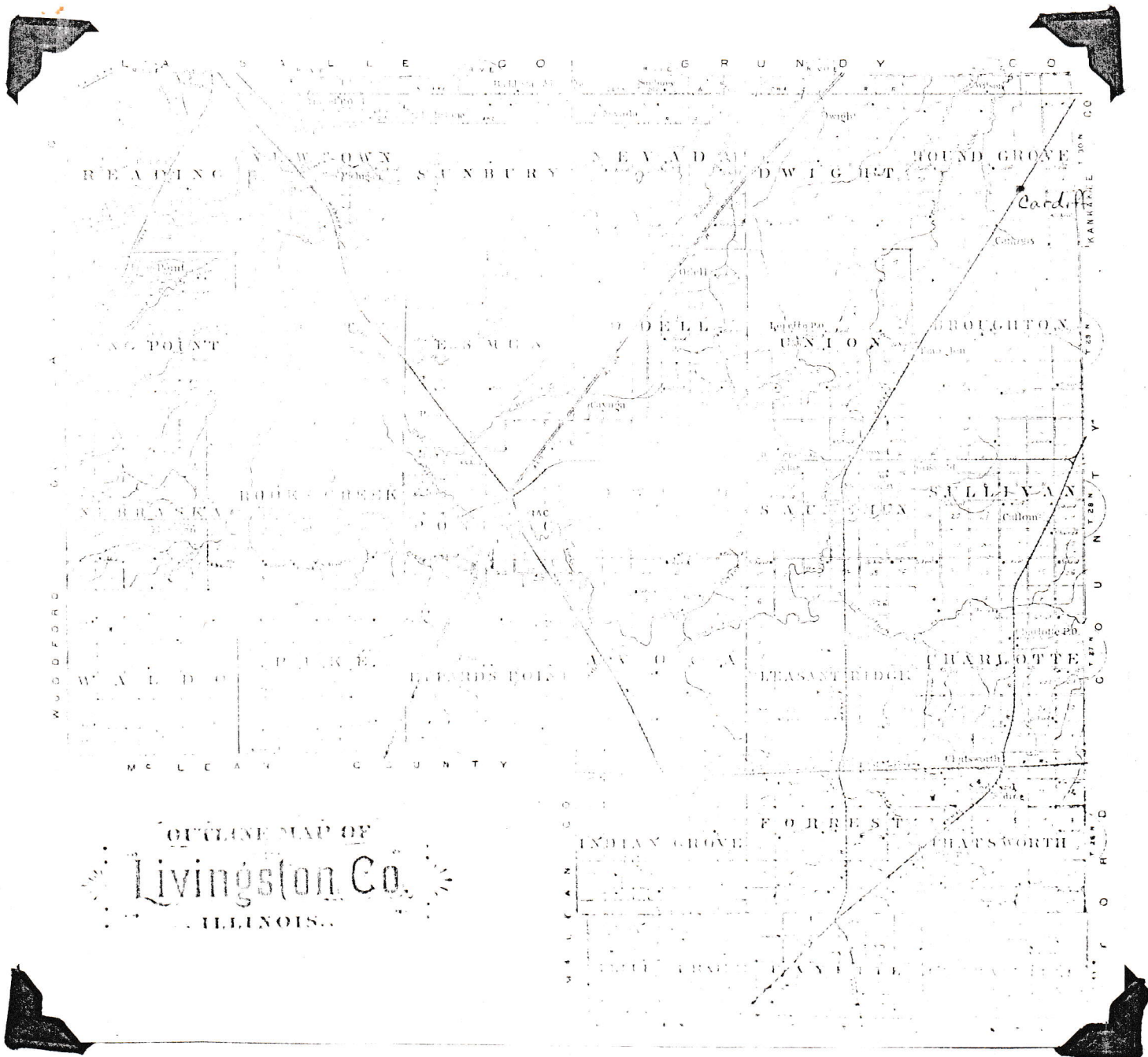
LIVINGSTON COUNTY
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Cardiff, Illinois:
An Examination of a City That Failed

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Mr. Joe Benitone, farmer, Cardiff, Illinois

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Cities have historically been exciting and interesting places which have drawn the attention of scholars to prepare a vast number of studies to explain the nature of these dynamic centers. Many of these studies have centered upon the forces that worked together to create the cities and sustain them. From city to city, similarities exist in these creative forces. For example, strategic geographic location, whether it be the crossroads of overland trails, the mouth of a natural bay or inlet which can serve as a seaport, or the intersection of important inland rivers, has been a significant reason for the growth of many cities. People grouping for protection against physical or emotional danger has also been the cause of the growth of many early cities. Besides these natural phenomena that brought agglomerations of people into urban centers, in our more recent history, man made forces have been at work to create our cities; namely the artificial demand which real estate promoters can instill in an area and the need for large population groupings and urban business which a prosperous industry being introduced into an area will produce. Most studies which have dealt with these forces of creativity have been the beginning of the chronicle of existence of a successful and flourishing city. Seldom has there been a need to concentrate on reasons why a city, founded on one of these legitimate premises, failed to flourish and ceased to exist. I intend this paper to be a study of one such city which appeared to have been founded on a sound financial basis; a basis which allowed it to flourish for a time, despite what might have been considered major setbacks, but, in the final analysis, a city which failed and for all practical purposes ceased to exist. The city in question is Cardiff,

Illinois which is, or more practically was, located in Round Grove Township, in the extreme northwest corner of Livingston County, on the main line of the Wabash railroad.¹ Cardiff was industrially created, that industry being coal, and boomed for thirteen years on the profits made from that black substance which the city's residents dug from the ground. At the end of those thirteen years, though, the city died, or maybe was killed, leaving only the shell of what had once been the most riotous spot in the entire area. What brought about the creation of this city at what can only be considered a very unlikely spot in this predominately rural prairie area? What was the complexion and flavor of the city during the years when it sported two coal mines and sundry other industries? And finally, did the city die from a malignant disease which had been bred into it and festering there from its very inception, was it killed by outside forces beyond its control, or was it a combination of both of these destructive factors? These are the questions which I will attempt to deal with in the scope of my paper. In answering these questions, I will be examining circumstances that many other Illinois coal towns experienced, towns that survived the closing of their major industry, whereas Cardiff could not. My examinations, therefore, will reveal why Cardiff was unable to survive and became a Midwestern ghost town.

To those who are natives of Illinois or, for that matter, any part of the Midwest, it is hard to deal with the knowledge that a ghost

¹ Inventory of the County Archives of Illinois: Livingston County, (Chicago: Works Progress Administration, 1940), p. 8.

town could exist in the midst of rolling grain fields, small quiet residential communities, and here and there, a population center which qualifies as a city. The words "ghost town" usually bring to mind a picture something like this: a desert where endless wind blows sand and tumbleweeds into the sides and rooms of a few tumble down shanties. The sand blasted walls of those buildings always sport a few almost unreadable signs which give testimony to the occupation which was carried on within them and inside those walls are always the cast-off remnants of the life of the town--broken bits of furniture, dishes, and silverware left out as if they were being used and suddenly abandoned, and mounds of sand and dust encrusting all of this. It is very hard to imagine any such scene existing in north central Illinois, but the abandoned buildings of several such "ghost" towns dot many communities in Illinois. In fact, Illinois enjoys the distinction of having more instances of abandoned settlements than any other state in the Union.¹ Because Illinois was settled so rapidly during the pioneer era of the eighteen hundreds, there were innumerable villages founded on the hope that they would become important population centers. Illinois, and Livingston County in particular, had more than its share of those who failed, usually because a railroad or some other industry was promised there and then placed somewhere else, or because a town with a more stable financial basis was located near the shaky community. Richmond, founded in 1851, boomed for a time because the Chicago and Alton railroad was to pass through it. It died quickly

¹ Bateman, Newton and Selby, Paul, A History of Livingston County, (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1909), p. 824.

though, when the railroad missed it by two miles.¹ Another "ghost town" was New Michigan, founded in 1850, a town which at one time had the only academy in Livingston County, but which faded when coal was discovered six miles northwest of it at Streator.² Other Livingston County casualties were Avoca, Sullivan Center, Murphy Station, Norman, Potosi, Zockville, and Windtown.³ Not atypical of these was the city of Cardiff which at one time produced more coal than any of the other thirteen mines in Livingston County and was sixtieth in overall production of all of the mines in the state of Illinois.⁴ To take advantage of this tremendous productivity, the population of Cardiff swelled and involved itself in typically urban pursuits. Between 1900 and 1910, some former residents of the city claim that the population was somewhere in the neighborhood of 2500 to 3000, although no official figures can be found to document that assertion. The population had declined to 1,031 according to the census of 1910, but when its closest neighbors, Reddick and Campus, had 288 and 241 residents respectively at that time, Cardiff was still a sizeable urban center.⁵ No matter how thriving a record Cardiff presented for herself, however, evidence can not

¹ Inventory of the County Archives of Illinois: Livingston County, (Chicago: Works Progress Administration, 1940), p. 8.

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Fourth Annual Coal Report 1905, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1906), p. 69.

⁵ Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, vol. II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 468.

be denied that she, like her sisters mentioned above, became an abandoned settlement, a ghost town if you will. An inspection of the town by the Works Progress Administration, who published a directory to the Livingston County Archives in 1940, brought the following description of Cardiff at that time:

"Abandoned buildings are crumbling and those that remain stand doorless and windowless in an unpremeditated welcome to the elements."¹

I can think of no better description of a Midwestern ghost town than this--and that was in 1940. Today the likeness is even more disturbing as all that remains to testify to the existence of the once bustling community are two pinkish humps of earth, a clustering of trees, a few tumbling houses, one store, and bits of once crowded sidewalks which can be found here and there among the weeds and sod. Cardiff underwent a period of rapid expansion, unrivaled prosperity for the time, and equally rapid decline on its way to becoming the spirit of the community described above. Now let me turn to a description of the birth, life, and death of this coal mining city.

In 1899, Livingston County was a predominately rural community. Its major occupation was producing agricultural products, especially corn. In fact, before 1907, Livingston County was the greatest corn producing county in Illinois producing, on the average, an estimated twenty million bushels of corn per year.² Although there were many

¹ Inventory of the County Archives of Illinois: Livingston County, (Chicago: Works Progress Administration, 1940), p. 9.

² Ibid., p. 7.

small villages scattered throughout the county, only two urban areas could be classified as cities in 1899, those being Pontiac, located in Pontiac Township and Fairbury, located in Avoca Township. Though agriculture occupied major interest in the county, some other economic capacities did receive attention. One of those was coal. Coal was discovered in Livingston County in the 1850's in Reading Township where it was mined by the land's owner and sold for one dollar per load.¹ The first coal shaft was sunk in the county in 1863 at Fairbury and several others were begun in the years which followed.² In 1899, there were twelve such mines in the county when the White Breast Fuel Coal Company of Chicago, which had done some exploration for coal in the South Wilmington area in the previous year, secured mineral rights for the ground lying beneath several area farms. Drilling crews came during the summer of 1899 to probe for coal veins. Significant evidence of coal was discovered to warrant the creation of an independent company called the Campus Coal Company which informed the State Bureau of Mines in 1899 that it was preparing to sink a shaft two miles north of the village of Campus in Round Grove Township just west of the existing Wabash railroad.³ Men and machinery arrived in late summer to begin sinking the shaft which encountered a significant coal vein--a twelve foot one at two

¹ Newton Bateman and Paul Selby, A History of Livingston County, (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1909), p. 614.

² Ibid., p. 617.

³ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Eighteenth Annual Coal Report, 1899, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1899), p. 4.

hundred thirty nine feet and a three and one half foot one at two hundred fifty five feet.¹ News of the coal discovery spread rapidly through the rather close knit northern Illinois mining community, and within weeks miners began to pour into the area and settle near the mine. Although all significant mining nationalities were eventually represented in the community, the first appear to have been of Welsh descent, as they had the name of the Campus Coal Company changed on October 21, 1899 to that of the Cardiff Coal Company with Charles I. Pierce as president and Joseph M. Blee as secretary.² Cardiff was the name of a famous Welsh mining town which in the early 1900's became the largest coal exporting city in the world.³ Apparently the founders of the Illinois Cardiff had similar aspirations for the Welsh community's namesake. Though Cardiff is not listed in the 1900 census, it was incorporated on May 24, 1900 and in the next seven years added four subdivisions, usually naming them after the property owner that the city had acquired the land for the subdivision from.⁴ The Cardiff Coal Company subdivision in the northeast section of the city was

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Eighteenth Annual Coal Report, 1899, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1899), p. 5.

² Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 5, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1899), p. 258.

³ Katherine A. Harvey, The Best Dressed Miners, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 48.

⁴ Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 6, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1900), p. 142.

incorporated on October 19, 1907.¹ This subdivision contained all of the company owned housing in town but did not restrict those who wished to build their own homes there from doing so. Unique from all the other subdivisions in town, the Cardiff Coal Company prevented any type of business pursuits from taking up residence in their subdivision. While this prevented the "rougher" elements from contaminating this area of the city, which was for the most part separated from the rest of the city by the Wabash tracks, those bad social elements became concentrated on the other side of the tracks along Wabash and Main streets, making these very unsavory streets to enter at night.

Feehery's subdivision, located in the southwest portion of the city, was incorporated on October 19, 1907.² This subdivision also contained no businesses, not because they were forbidden, but because it was located too far away from the mines, the gas plant, or other places of interest in the community. This subdivision remained the least populated and contained the one hundred forty acres of the Thomas Feehery farm.³

Murphy's subdivision, in the southeast portion of the city, was incorporated on October 26, 1907.⁴ This subdivision contained numerous

¹ Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 12, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1907), p. 273.

² Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 12, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1907), p. 273.

³ Livingston County Platt Book #3, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1910), p. 48.

⁴ Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 12, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1907), p. 275.

Cardiff Coal Co.

Lot 22

S.E. 1/4 S.E. 1/4 Sec 22

CARDIFF
ROUND GROVE TWP.
Scale: 300ft.-1 inch.

Lot 24

S.E. 1/4 S.E. 1/4 Sec 22

Cardiff Coal Company
Lot 1
1328
F. E. Ahern
110

S.W. 1/4 S.E. 1/4 Sec. 22

Livingston County Platt

Book #3

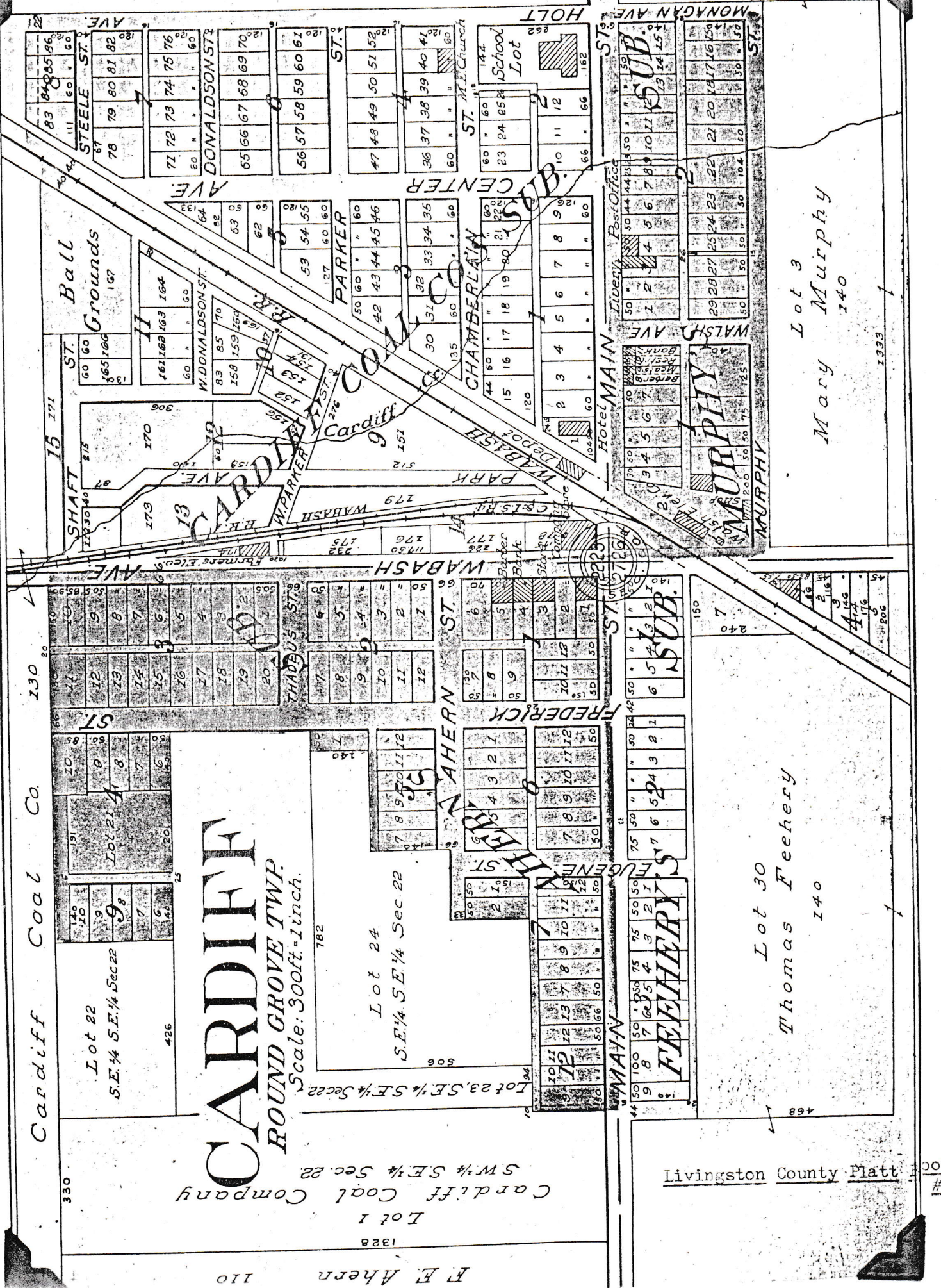
Lot 30
Thomas Feehery
140

140

Lot 3

Mary Murphy
140

1333



Wm. Flood

businesses, as one of its boundary streets was Main Street, already referred to as a major thoroughfare for business interests. One other subdivision, Ahern's, was incorporated on November 18, 1907.¹ It was located in the northwest portion of the city adjacent to shaft number two of the mine and contained the other major portion of the city's business along Wabash street.

The mine which supported this growth of residential property and a thriving business community was very prosperous for company and miner alike. In 1900, the capital stock of the Cardiff Coal Company was valued at one hundred fifty thousand dollars, consisting of fifteen hundred shares at one hundred dollars each.² In the first year of its operation, the mine produced 166,395 tons of coal.³ At an average price that year of sixty five cents per ton, this brought in over one hundred eight thousand dollars for the company and made the average wages for a miner, depending of course on how hard he worked, four hundred ninety four dollars and thirty eight cents per year.⁴ This was an extremely handsome wage for miners in the year 1900 and brought a large influx of population, mainly immigrants from other coal fields, to Cardiff to take advantage of the profits. Even though the mining conditions in the Cardiff mine were not as comfortable and ideal as

¹ Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 12, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1907), p. 323.

² Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 6, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1900), p. 157.

³ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Ninth Annual Coal Report 1910, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1911), p. 170.

⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

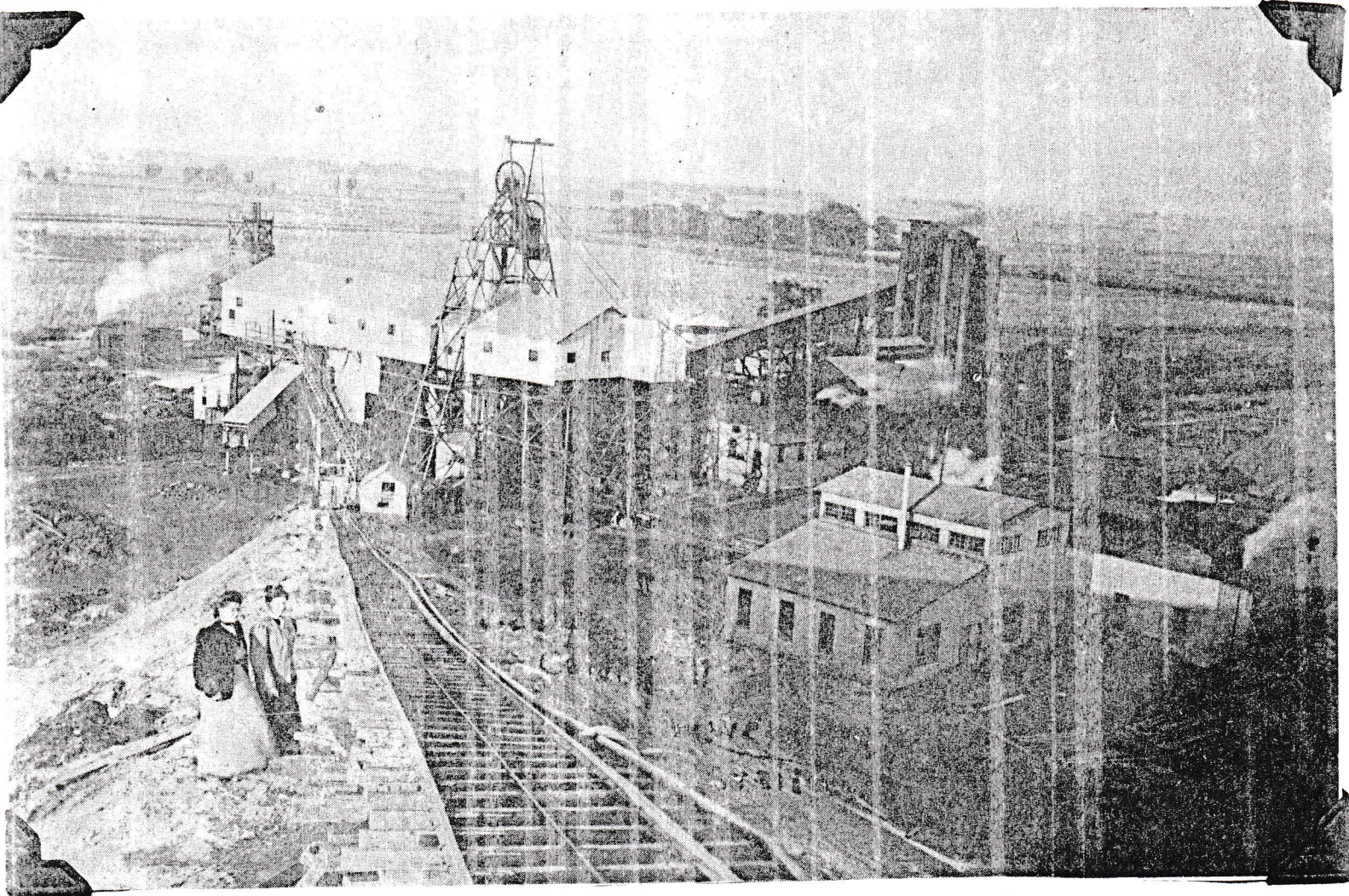
those that could be found in other mine fields, as long as the high wages could be obtained and the tonnage produced stayed markedly up, the miners here did not seem to complain. These less than ideal conditions included all hand mining, with pillar and room mining possible in the twelve foot vein, but an uncomfortable, very cramped, and dirty atmosphere existed in the lower three foot vein which had to be mined long wall, either kneeling if the miner was short enough or lying flat and chipping away at the coal inches from his face.¹ There was also no mechanization inside the mine which made it necessary for mules to be utilized to haul the mined coal through the tunnels to the hoisting shaft. These mules were stabled inside the mine, creating sometimes less than savory working conditions down inside the mine.

Even with these conditions, which we would probably consider very primitive in the present day, productivity and wages at the Cardiff mines continued at relatively stable levels throughout the twelve years of the mine's existence. Starting with just over 132,000 tons mined in its first year, the tonnage increased steadily every year, with exception of 1903, until 1908, with the highest level of productivity being 246,781 tons in that year.² From this year on, the production of the Cardiff mine gradually decreased for two years and then took a dramatic plunge in 1911 when the miners worked two hundred eighty four days and were able to chip out of the mine only 79,174 tons of coal.³ Production was even less than

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twentieth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1902), p. 73.

² Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Seventh Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1909), p. 46.

³ State Mining Board, Thirtieth Annual Coal Report, 1911, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1912), p. 192-193.



Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics
Nineteenth Annual Coal Report,
(Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1901)

THE OLD INDISPENSABLE.

this in 1912, when the mine closed, but I was unable to obtain exact tonnage figures for that year. The best grades of coal: mine run, lump, and egg, were worth one dollar and twelve cents per ton in 1900.¹ In combination with the other grades of coal mined at Cardiff, namely nut, pea, slack, and screenings, in 1900 the average coal sold from the mine in Cardiff was worth ninety-five cents per ton.² With minor fluctuations, the value of the coal mined to the Cardiff Coal Company increased until 1908 when it averaged one dollar and fifty seven cents per ton.³ After this level was reached, however, the amount of the better grades of coal being produced at Cardiff decreased so that by the time the mine closed, Cardiff coal was worth, on the average, seventy four cents per ton.⁴

Of course, to make a profit, the wages the company paid to its employees had to be less than what the coal was worth to the company. Wages were therefore set by the company to maximize their profits, but not to place any hardship upon the miners. In the first two years of the mine's operation, employees of the Cardiff Coal Company received fifty eight cents for each ton they mined and each miner was able to produce between two and one half and four tons of coal per day.⁵ How much any

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nineteenth Annual Coal Report 1900, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1901), p. 34.

² Ibid., p. 43.

³ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Seventh Annual Coal Report 1908, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1909), p. 92.

⁴ State Mining Board, Thirtieth Annual Coal Report, 1911, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1912), p. 103.

⁵ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twentieth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1902), p. 315.

miner could earn was totally relative to how much effort he put in. Those wages, as might be expected, continued to increase as long as production increased, with the highest level reached being just under one dollar for each ton mined.¹ The average worker during this twelve year period could mine between four hundred and six hundred tons of coal per year, and seldom made over five hundred dollars a year with the twelve year average being \$446.18 and the highest yearly total average being \$508.31.² According to all sources consulted, it is apparent that these were more than adequate wages for most miners to live on, and made it possible for them to thrive and take advantage of all the pleasures and pains that the bustling city of Cardiff had to offer.

Even though an air of benevolence on the part of the company permeated the atmosphere of the city, Cardiff was still a mining town, created, fostered, and supported by the Cardiff Coal Company. When the mine opened, the company owned all the land in which the men worked, the land on which his house stood, usually the house itself, the store where they shopped, and later schools where his children studied, and the churches where the family prayed. In many parts of this country, a situation similar to this would lead to a type of feudalism where masters demanded full control over their servant's lives and usually got it. This situation, according to interviews with those who lived under it, did not exist in Cardiff. Here it appears the company provided everything that the miner and his family needed, without demanding anything exorbitant in return.

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Fourth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1906), p. 97.

² Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Ninth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1911), p. 142.

Practically all of the miners who arrived at Cardiff in late 1899, early 1900, or even later, were immigrants: Italians, Scots, Irish, Welsh, Germans, and Bohemians, who had spent their lives moving from one mining camp to another without any permanence in their lives. Arriving in a new environment, these miners were happy to find that most of their general needs were taken care of. The company constructed small, uniform houses in what became the Cardiff Coal Company subdivision for about five hundred dollars each and rented them to miners for five dollars per month.¹ Because mines at this time were such fleeting businesses, private builders could not be expected to build low cost housing in a city such as Cardiff. Most miners could not afford to build their own houses so the company gave them exactly what they needed. The company also provided reasonably priced goods in the company store. According to sources, anything from buttons to beds could be obtained. The miners were paid either with regular money or chits that could be redeemed for merchandise at the store. The Cardiff Coal Company also provided land for a lot, number 162. Company subdivision, for the construction of a large, two story schoolhouse which eventually provided education through the eighth grade for several hundred Cardiff youngsters.¹ The company tried to provide a quality residential life to its miners and their families by banning any kind of business activities from the company subdivision and by donating the land and money for construction of a lighted ballfield on which semi-pro baseball was

¹ A.F. Hinrichs, The United Mine Workers and the Non-Union Coal Fields, (New York: AMS Press, 1968), pp. 61-62.

² Livingston County Municipal Records, vol. 7, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1901), p. 203.

played for the entertainment of Cardiff residents and the surrounding community. So, even though the potential for danger existed in the relationship between the Cardiff Coal Company and their employees, that danger was never fulfilled and instead the relationship can be described as follows:

"The coal company touches the miner's life at every point. If there is a playground for his children, it is because the company has generously supplied it. If the prices charged him for food are reasonable, it is because the coal company decrees it. If the physical aspects of his life, on the whole are tolerable, it is because he is fortunate enough to have a benificent employer." ¹

So the question comes to mind, what was this company city like that rose from the prairie, gleamed for a time, and then died without even the privilege of withering away time? Cardiff was a footloose city, filled with people who had chased such mine openings before and would again. These men and their families, whether they be miners, cagers, mule drivers, laborers, shotfirers, timbermen, trackmen, trappers, or any of the number of others who were lured to this city to open businesses or work in the related industries which grew up in the city such as the gas plant which provided streetlighting for the city, lived a hard life. Their jobs were dangerous and the paycheck that had to come twice a month depended upon their staying uninjured and able to work every day, even though the very work that they did made it highly probable that sometime during each year the worker might be injured so badly that he could never work again. Dealing with this tension each day on his shift at

¹ A. F. Hinrichs, The United Mine Workers and the Non-Union Coal Fields, (New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 53.

whatever his occupation, the Cardiff resident needed time to release this tension once work was over. Since transportation was poor, a worker could not travel outside of town to find entertainment and relaxation, so two streets in the city provided exactly what these hard living men demanded. Along the lengthth of Wabash Avenue and Main Street were located, at one time or another, eighteen saloons, some very small indeed but still liquor serving, a hotel which was very popular with traveling salesmen and miners alike ostensibly because it served good food, and a dance hall which rang with music all night long on Saturday night and sometimes on at least one week night. The city had more than its share of young, unmarried miners who notoriously do not upgrade the character of a community in which they live. Rootless, with no ties, these men kept a room at the hotel, if they could afford it, or more likely joined three or four others like themselves and rented a room in the house of some married miner and his family. This sounds like a pretty crowded living arrangement but all roommates would seldom be in their rented residence at the same time. They would sleep in shifts the minimum amount they could get by with, and then work their shift and party as many hours as were left. Three train carloads of beer were rolled into the city from Milwaukee or Kankakee each week and seldom did a drop go to waste. According to James Tyrell, a long time resident of Cardiff, at its height:

"Hell was raised sixteen hours a day. The women and children bickered and yammered on the streets all day. In late afternoon the miners came off shift and roistered until midnight." ¹

On Saturday nights the above the scene was dragged out until dawn, with

¹ "Illinois Ghost Town," Chicago Sunday Tribune, (July 20, 1950), p. 12.

the addition of large numbers of farmers from the countryside who chose Cardiff as the perfect place to go to let off steam after a long week's work.

And let off steam they did, farmers, miners, and businessmen alike. If asked to characterize Cardiff, most people in the area, including Cardiff residents themselves, would use the adjectives "rough", "wild", and "tough" to describe the city. Mrs. George Matern, who lived in Cardiff when she was a young girl, said that the uptown district was so bad day and night that "my mother wouldn't allow me to go there alone."¹ This appears to have been fairly typical of most females, young or old, among Cardiff's residents. Besides the presence of the saloons, other things made the "partying district" of Cardiff unwholesome for respectable people. A day did not go by without several brawls along Wabash and Main, brawls that usually resulted in the arrest and jailing of the culprits for a short "cooling off" period by the two town marshalls. These brawls were usually the results either of the drinks which the fighters had consumed or of long standing old world feuds between nationalities that had existed for generations.² Whatever the reason though, activities such as this kept the city's jail extremely busy and made the employing of the two law enforcement officials a necessity and not a for-show luxury. These officials kept occupied with other types of cases as well.

There were numerous deaths due to violence which were labeled accidental. These usually were incidents involving a drunken miner reeling out of one of the taverns which had the unfortunate distinction

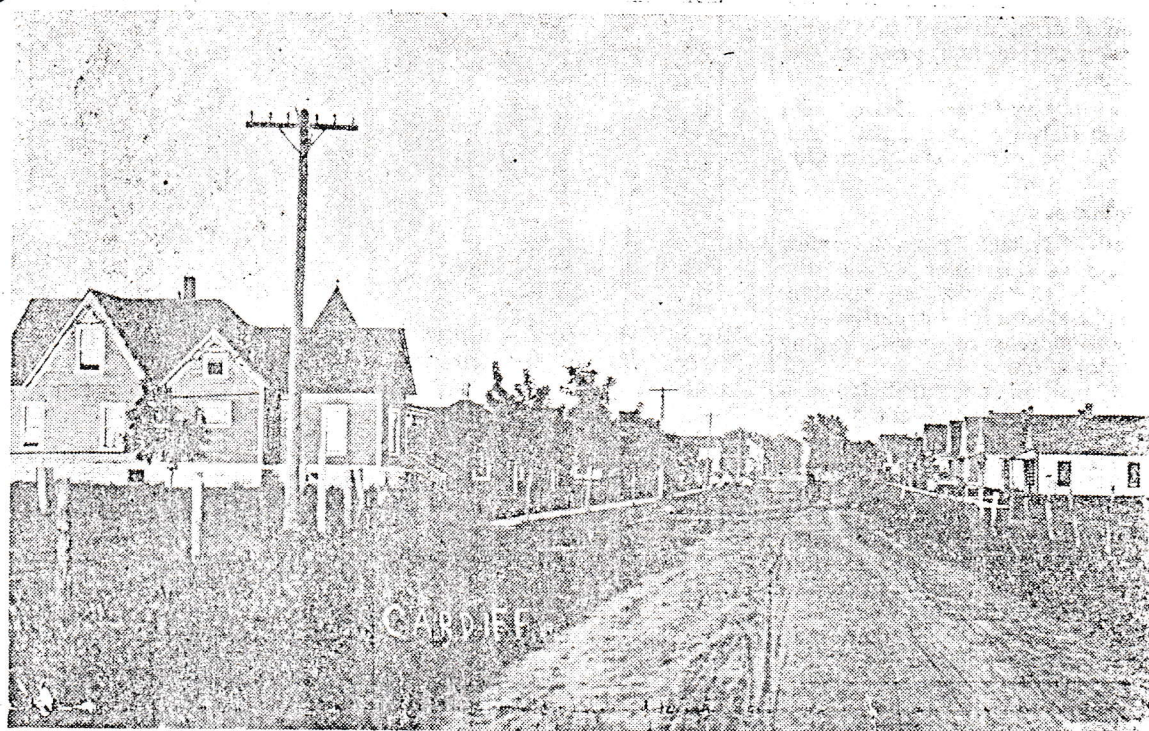
¹ Interview conducted with Mrs. George Matern, July 7, 1979.

² "Illinois Ghost Town," Chicago Sunday Tribune, (July 20, 1950), p. 12.

of being located very near the Wabash railroad tracks. The miner would either collapse on the tracks and be run over by the evening train, or be struck by one that was immediately approaching. On top of this there were two murders in Cardiff, both of which may or may not have had Mafia connections.¹ One of these murders involved a shooting following an argument in the Club saloon in the later years of the decade. (I was unable to find the specific date for this occurrence.) The murderer was arrested, brought to trial, but no record of the verdict from that trial was available. Maybe no verdict was ever issued. The other murder occurred in 1904 and its circumstances were much more fascinating than the other. It appears that three men had an argument outside one of the saloons, apparently over money. One of the men was the blacksmith from the mine and the identities of the other two were unavailable although one source reported that they were not miners.² The blacksmith was hit over the head with a bottle, and then dragged by the two men to the livery stable which was to the rear of the tavern. There they proceeded to beat him until he appeared to be dead. Unsure of what to do with the "body" the two "murderers" carried the body to the railroad siding and laid it on the tracks where they hoped the train would hit him, making this appear to be one of those previously mentioned accidental deaths. The blacksmith was not dead, however, and he was able to slowly roll off the tracks where he was found several hours later lying next to the siding. Still conscious when found, he was able to tell his story, but he died two days later.

1 "Illinois Ghost Town," Chicago Sunday Tribune, (July 20, 1950), p. 12.

2 Interview conducted with Mr. Joe Benitone, July 7, 1979.



MAIN STREET 1908 — Orderly rows of houses lined Cardiff's main street in 1908 when the mine was at peak production and the town was in its heyday. The large house at the left was the home of Cardiff's mayor, Fred E. Ahern, Sr., who founded two baseball teams in the town and was president of one of Cardiff's two banks.

"Explosion at Cardiff Mine Gives Preview of Final Closing,"
Pontiac Daily Leader, (July 25, 1964), p. 3.

Apparently the murderers were able to leave town and were never found to be returned for trial. So much for evidence of the roughness of the city of Cardiff.

The city was not all its mines, taverns, and Saturday nights, however. The town had another side which few but its own residents saw. That was the face of a prosperous business community and a pleasant residential community which prompted one former resident to say "It was a good place to live. Everyone liked to come to Cardiff because it was a good place to live and work."¹ There were really three other industries in town besides the mine. The coal gas plant, which, by the way made night baseball possible in Cardiff, provided many workers with jobs and made the city a more inviting place to live besides cutting down on crime since the streets were lighted at night. There was a soda pop bottling factory in town which provided non-alcoholic refreshment for the city's population, although no figures were available on how much was sold out of town. The third industry was one that could be found in any town located in the grain belt. Three grain elevators to receive, store, or ship the grain area farmers grew, thrived in the city even though only one could usually support itself in a town.

These industries, plus the coal mine, allowed numerous businesses to grow in the town. One was a very fine hotel, located near the train depot. There were three grocery stores, one company and two others, all of which had competing prices. Two butcher shops served the city, one belonging to the company and the other run by a family known as the

¹ Interview conducted with Mrs. George Matern, July 7, 1979.

Ronchetti's.¹ Here again the prices appear to have been competitive. There were several barber shops, one of which was run by Tom Brennan, two livery stables, a bowling alley, an ice house, a theater, two very prosperous banks, one of which was named the Farmers and Miners Bank, a doctor's office where Doctor Keller took patients from in and out of town, a candy factory, two bakeries, and a two story four room school where miner's children could attend first through eighth grades. There they studied under a female teacher such as Helen Kane or Eta Cody who had herself graduated from that four room school only a few years before.²

For recreation, the city fostered the growth of two bands. one of them, a Bohemian band, was sought after to play in Kankakee and even Chicago. There was a racetrack laid out behind the livery stables where horses were raced on weekend afternoons. Revolted by the sight of drunken miners reeling in the streets, Mrs. Julia D. Ahern, wife of the first mayor of Cardiff, Fred E. Ahern, forced the marshalls to close the saloons in town on Sundays.³ Forced to provide something else for the miners to do on Sundays, Mr. Ahern organized two baseball teams which the miners were eager to join. These teams were the F.E.A.'s and the Cardiff Cubs. Miners who belonged to the teams were so dedicated, they would leave work at the end of their shift, about three o'clock, and go immediately to practice for an hour or two before moving on to other pursuits. One of these teams, the F.E.A.'s, was considered to be one

¹ Interview conducted with Mrs. George Matern, July 7, 1979.

² Interview conducted with Mrs. Betty Biava, July 7, 1979.

³ "Illinois Ghost Town," Chicago Sunday Tribune, (July 20, 1950), p. 12.

of the best baseball teams in the state and toured the state when the miners could get time off.¹ On Sundays, teams from around the state traveled into Cardiff to play games which drew large crowds from Cardiff and the surrounding community, not to mention as far away as Chicago.

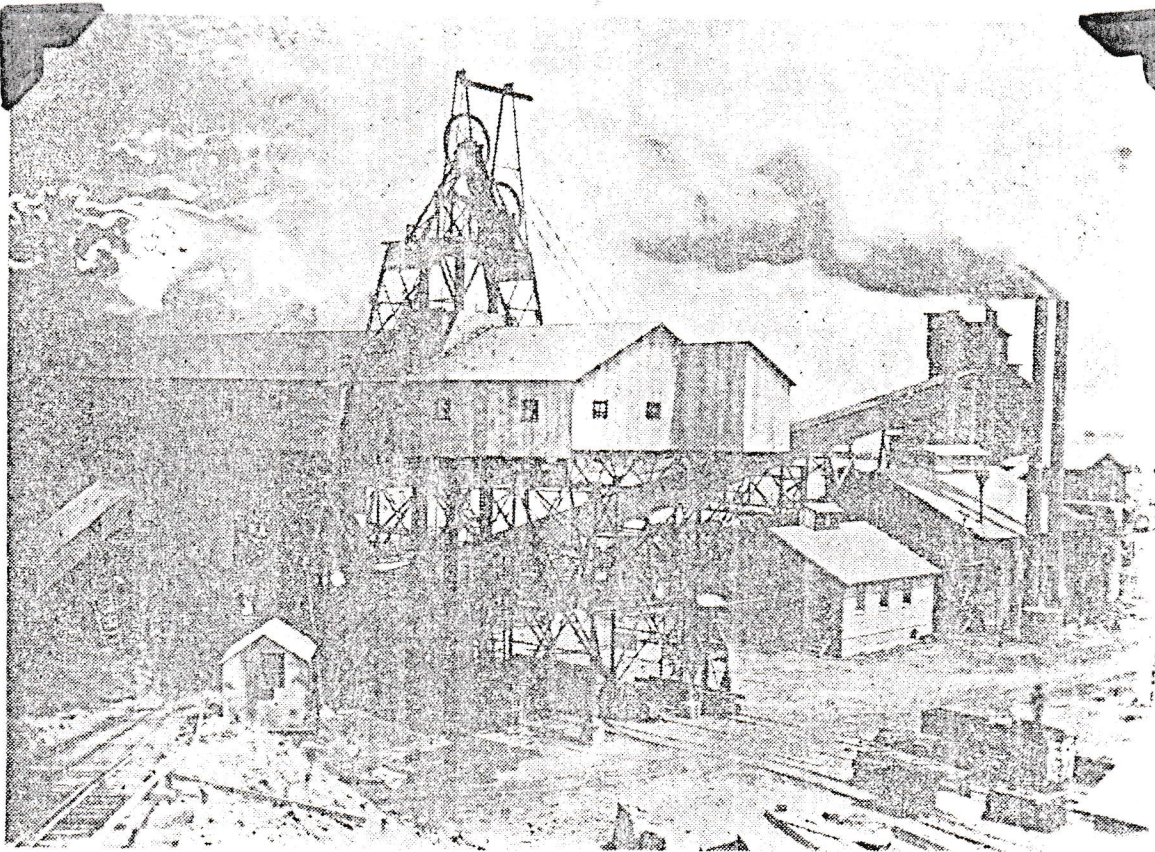
There also were two Protestant churches in town and the pastors of these were kept busy denouncing the shady life of the town in their Sunday morning sermons.² Even though there was a large Catholic population in Cardiff, no Catholic church was ever constructed. Sunday mass was conducted in a room above one of the town's saloons whenever a priest could travel there after completing his duties in Campus. Instead of attending this service, however, many of the Catholics walked the tracks to Campus every Sunday morning, winter or summer, to attend mass in the Catholic church there. Many Catholic children also walked those tracks to attend catechism once a week in Campus. Mrs. George Matern was one of those youngsters and she felt that these trips were really the only recreation or "fun" which many Catholic youngsters in Cardiff had.³

Two of those that I interviewed were children or teenagers when Cardiff was booming. They related that although life was not luxurious for miners or their families in Cardiff, they did consider it good. Mrs. Matern arrived in town with her family shortly after the opening of shaft number one in 1899. Her family moved into one of the one story company houses. Had they chosen a two story dwelling, the upstairs would have undoubtedly been rented out to another family anyway. These houses

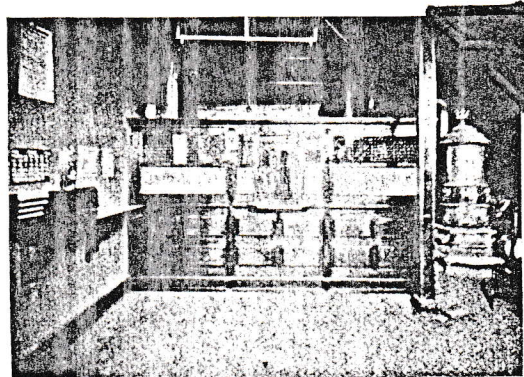
¹ Interview conducted with Mr. Joe Benitone, July 7, 1979.

² "Sixty Years Ago Cardiff Was A Bustling Mining Town," Pontiac Daily Leader, (July 24, 1964), p. 2.

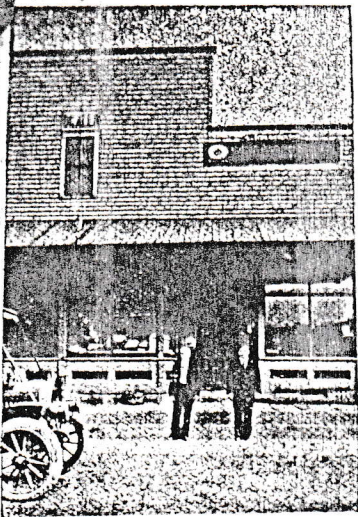
³ Interview conducted with Mrs. George Matern, July 7, 1979.



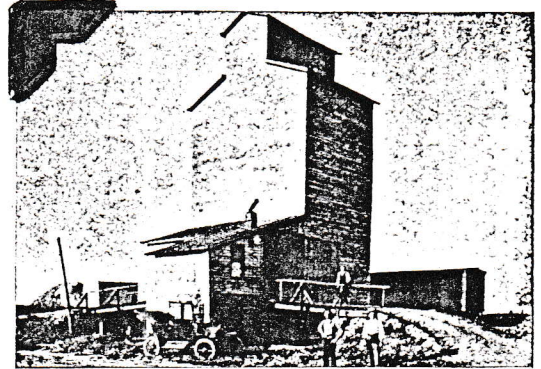
CARDIFF AROUND 1908—Over 400 miners labored on two shifts around the clock in the Cardiff No. 2 mine, shown here at peak production around 1903. Two railroads shipped the coal out of Cardiff to consumers. The mining operation gave birth to the bustling community, of over 2,000 people which all disappeared when the mine closed in 1912.



INTERIOR VIEW OF FARMER'S AND MINER'S BANK, CARDIFF, ILL.



STORE OF ROLANDA & SON, CARDIFF, ILL.



CAMPUS GRAIN CO'S. ELEVATOR, CARDIFF, ILL.

Livingston County Platt Book #3, (Pontiac: County Clerk's Office, 1910), p. 46.

were little more than shelters at the beginning with no indoor plumbing for either water or sanitation. The bathroom was the privy out back and for a time drinking water was rationed in containers to families after being hauled into the city in tanks.¹ As the city grew, a well was dug in the uptown area where again families had to go and carry water home, but they could have an unlimited quantity. If a family wanted hot water for laundry, dishes, bath water, whatever, they could carry it home from barrels which were located near the mine shaft. Mrs. Matern did laundry for other people in town, and she reported that she carried a lot of hot water home this way.² By 1908, the company had installed a high pressure water system for the community, but many company houses continued to be without any indoor plumbing.

According to Mrs. Matern, there was always enough money for her family to live comfortably and she felt that this was true of most of the families in town, at least until the last year of the mine's operation. Like many Cardiff youngsters, Mrs. Matern did not finish school. Thinking that it provided very little for her, and being bored with it, she quit when she was in fifth grade and went to work doing laundry and cleaning houses, including the office of Dr. Keller. To the best of her memory, Mrs. Matern thought that many other girls also quit school early whereas most boys stayed to finish the eighth grade because the company discouraged their working in the mine until that time. There were very few other jobs available to males in Cardiff whereas girls could find domestic types of employment.³

¹ Interview with Mrs. George Matern, July 7, 1979.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

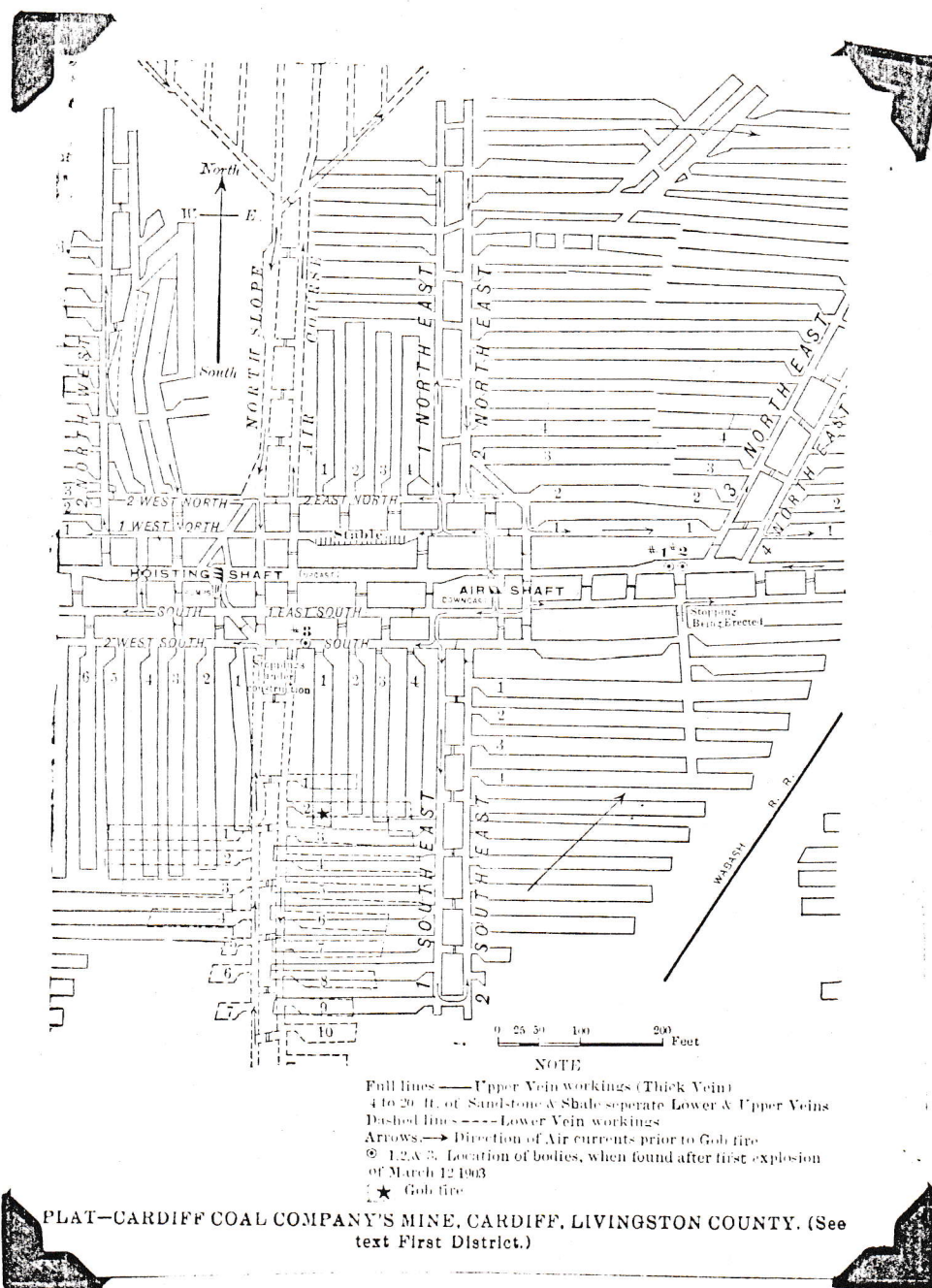
Such was the atmosphere which Cardiff provided for its citizens. Plenty of work, plenty of money, and a bustling business community to complement the mine seemed to provide a solid basis for the continuation of the life of the city. Seeming to support these indices, the city survived a disaster in 1903 with little or any permanent loss of population or business. This disaster involved the death of nine miners in a mine explosion, a severe tragedy for a mine that suffered few fatalities or serious injuries during its entire existence and had been practically injury free before the explosion.¹ Prior to the explosion, there were no deaths in the Cardiff mine and there had been only two relatively non-serious injuries involving falling rock or coal.² During the entire twelve year period of the mine's operation, with the exception of the 1903 explosion, there were only seven deaths and thirty-one non-fatal injuries.³ Compared to other mining ventures in the area, especially Streator where 256 lost their lives in one incident, this was a marvelous safety record which apparently helped attract many miners to Cardiff.⁴ It is surprising then, that the tragedy that claimed the lives of nine in four days and forced the closing of shaft number one, did not have more of a detrimental effect on the city. Apparently the miners had faith that this was a freak occurrence, not the starting of a chain of bad luck events, and chose to stick with Cardiff even after the explosion.

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Second Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1904), p. 146.

² Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Fourth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1906), p. 124.

³ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Coal Reports 1899-1911.

⁴ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Ninth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1911), p. 247.



The following is a chronicle of the events of March thirteenth through sixteenth, 1903 according to the report of the district one mine inspector, Hector McAllister.

A gob fire started on March thirteenth in the old shaft workings on the south slope, level one, which had been worked out and abandoned for over a year. Though not considered extremely serious, the mine was closed to regular shift workers, and fifteen men were sent into the mine to build and repair stoppings in the upper seam which the mine manager, Mr. Thomas J. Williams, hoped would smother the fire.¹ These men continued to work into the night, when the strata between the two seams in the mine caved in forming a draft for the fire. That draft caused an explosion that according to Mrs. Matern, shook the town awakening most of its residents.² A general alarm was given by Thomas Roberts, the night engineer, and a rescue party was sent down the escapement shaft. This party found ten men near the hoisting shaft and near the mule barn. Upon further search they found the bodies of three men: James Hewitt, 23, John McFlusky, 23, and James Parra, 41, who had been thrown against the works and killed by the force of the explosion. Two men remained missing and the search for them had to be called off until ventilation was established to the mine. That project took most of the night and by the time it was completed the following morning, the two missing miners found their way to the escape shaft and were rescued. On the fourteenth, the mine was inspected, found to be safe for workers, and men returned

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty-Fourth Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Company, 1906), p. 384.

² Interview conducted with Mrs. George Matern, July 7, 1979.

to the mine to commence repairs. These repairs continued, with small shifts of men building and repairing the stoppings through Sunday, March fifteenth. At 5:20 p.m., there were six men in the mine when the second explosion occurred. With this second explosion, many Cardiff families panicked and began moving their belongings out onto the street so that they would be able to flee quickly if the fires spread.¹ Those not involved in this pursuit crowded around the opening of the mine where superintendent W.H. Parker, was preparing to lead a party of volunteers into the mine. It took considerable time for the cage to reach the bottom of the shaft, owing to broken timbers clogging it. Only one man, William Humphreys, was found alive at the bottom of the shaft. The bodies of Anton Haskell, 38, and Anton Jeokoski, 23, were found on the south slope but the bodies of the other three men: William Alderson, 28, A. Wilson, 51, and James Hutchinson, 46, could not be found and the search was abandoned due to the bad condition of the air in the mine. The following morning at 9:30, before repair crews could be sent into the mine, an extremely violent explosion occurred, knocking down the pulley wheels and part of the tower at the air shaft. The end of the engine house was also blown out. A.M. Michaels, 38, a carpenter, was struck in the breast by timbers which were blown out of the top of the shaft. According to a newspaper account, flames towered one hundred feet above the shaft.² Deciding that further search for the missing men was useless, an order was given to flood the mine. During the time a ditch was being dug for

¹ "Explosion at Cardiff Mine Gives Preview of Final Closing," Pontiac Daily Leader, (July 25, 1964), p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 4.

this purpose, the hoisting and escapement shafts were covered over in hopes of smothering the fire. Another explosion occurred, however, at 2:37 p.m. blowing away both coverings. Shortly after, the ditch was completed and water was let into the mine. One more explosion occurred at 7:30 p.m. that day setting on fire all combustible materials around the top works. The heat coming out of the shaft was apparently so intense that the steel tower was warped beyond repair. That night the shaft caved in, letting in the surface around the top of the mine for a radius of twenty feet and leaving the tower hanging at a forty-five degree angle. Only a carload of cement dumped down the shaft ultimately quenched the below ground inferno. The cost of the fire was over one hundred thousand dollars. Nine men were left dead, including the three who remain entombed in the mine today. Six women and twenty five children were left without husbands and fathers.¹ As if this were not tragedy enough, however, hundreds of men, in a matters of days, were left without a source of income as the mine was unworkable.

As might be expected, many miners left Cardiff immediately for other mine fields, in order to make money to send to the families they left in Cardiff. Masses did not leave, however, and according to Mr. Joe Benitone, it was hard to tell that anything had happened to the bustling community. This is probably because the mine company immediately sank a new shaft, shaft number two, about a half mile west of the one destroyed by the explosion. This shaft was open by the end of July, and proved to be even more productive than the original mine.² Within

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twenty Second Annual Coal Report, (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1904), pp. 146-153.

² Ibid., p. 146.

a year the city was booming again and seemed to have forgotten almost completely about the events of March, 1903.

Those events proved to be a warning for what the city of Cardiff was to experience nine years later. Cardiff was a shipping mine, relying on large consumers and not local trade to sustain it. One of its largest consumers was the Wabash railroad which carried Cardiff's coal to its other, more distant, consumers. The Wabash railroad purchased eight carloads of coal from the mine every day and the fact that one of the main streets of the city was named after the railroad should give testimony to the importance of the railroad to the city.¹ The end of Cardiff was preordained in 1910 when the Wabash stopped buying Cardiff coal. According to Thomas Tyrrell, Wabash firemen were refusing to fire the coal because its quality had dropped.² Higher quality coal was available in the mine, but the costs to mine it were so great that the company could not make its accustomed profits depending upon it alone. Mining continued, though it was never a great success for the miners or the company. According to one miner who went through a similar experience in another mining town:

"You could tell that things were getting bad when the mines began to work less and less....I can remember for one month that all the miners drew was three shifts as far as pay was concerned. Some of the people moved but most of the people stayed. They couldn't spend very much money. They didn't live like they did before and the fellow sort of has to go down, particularly if the fellow does not have too much saved." ³

Apparently Cardiff residents had not been savers, and the cutbacks

¹ Fontiac Daily Leader, (July 25, 1964), p. 4.

² Ibid., p. 3.

³ Herman R. Lantz, People of Coal Town, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 190.

hurt families deeply. Many of the young single miners left to seek more profitable work elsewhere but most family men stayed, relying on the company's promise that they would sink a third shaft where better quality coal could be obtained more cheaply.

The final nail in Cardiff's coffin occurred in December, 1912 when eleven cars of a Wabash train loaded with cattle, hogs, and sheep on the way to the Fat Stock Show in Chicago derailed, crashing into the depot, where they overturned a stove and started a raging fire. That fire, according to Mr. Joe Benitone, who helped carry water to fight it, consumed the depot, the hotel, and hideously burned to death the livestock in eight of the derailed cars. The sound and stench of this were apparently almost unbearable.¹ Cardiff was in pandemonium December 4, the day following the fire. Livestock that had escaped the fire wandered the streets and farmers were paid one dollar per head to remove them from town. One steer was butchered on the street during the night by five men and they were fined eleven dollars each by company detectives.² Mr. Pete Menozzi was paid fifty dollars to bury the remains of the burned livestock, which he accomplished by dumping them down the air shaft of the old mine.³ And, the claims department of the Wabash railroad almost immediately reported that the hotel building would be paid for and that a new concrete depot would be erected in the spring. Apparently taking this second disaster in less than a decade as an omen, and losing money

¹ Interview conducted with Mr. Joe Benitone, July 7, 1979.

² "Explosion at Cardiff Mine Gives Preview of Final Closing," Pontiac Daily Leader, (July 25, 1964), p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 4.

on the barely functioning shaft, the Cardiff Coal Company chose to completely close the mine by the end of 1912, bringing to an end the basis of most of the resident's livelihoods.

Cardiff died quickly with hundreds of families moving out within weeks as husbands went north or south looking for other mining work. In some cases husbands went alone seeking work, to return several months later to take their families with them when they had earned enough money to be able to afford to do that. Mr. Joe Benitone recalls whole streets of houses owned by the mining company, which were sold for fifty to one hundred dollars each and moved out of town by steam engines or by rail. Other houses were bought by outside interests and wrecked on the spot for the lumber they contained.¹ The residents who owned their houses and property sold their property for on the average one hundred and fifty dollars, fifty dollars for the lot and one hundred dollars for the house.² The buyers were usually local farmers with Mr. Benitone's family being a big purchaser. Mining machinery and coal processing equipment were torn down and sold for scrap. Other homes were moved to farms or nearby towns. Only a few of the residents chose to stay as evidenced by the 1920 census, which found 152 people still living in Cardiff.³ This had fallen to twenty eight by 1930.⁴ By this time only a few battered and weatherbeaten residences, the ice house, a grain elevator, and the depot

¹ Interview conducted with Mr. Joe Benitone, July 7, 1979.

² Ibid.

³ Fourteenth Census of the United States, vol. I, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 161.

⁴ Fifteenth Census of the United States, vol. I, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 147.

that the train infrequently made stops for, was all that remained of Cardiff. Even the school had been closed. In the midst of all of these failures, one new business was opened in 1940 when Mrs. Betty Biava came to Cardiff and opened a confectionary store in the building which had once housed the Benitone General Store and the local post office. She and her store were witness to two very positive events, the coming of electricity and telephone service to Cardiff, but she also watched the population of the town dip to ten and below and saw the only roadsign pointing out the existence of the once fascinating city, disintegrate into the weeds, not to be replaced.¹

Today only skeletons, shadows, and memories remain of this city, and when its last former residents pass on, even these will be gone. What, in reality, therefore, caused its death? Money can create and sustain cities and there was money in Cardiff in the presence of the mine. But according to Jane Jacobs in her book The Death and Life of Great American Cities, "money cannot buy inherent success for cities where the conditions for inherent success are lacking."² Coal mines have never been long term successes and cities that grew up based upon them alone usually have failed. To guarantee survival, some type of permanent industries with sound community support, not dependent upon the coal mine had to develop. These also had to be services that other, already established communities could not provide. In Cardiff, this type of industry did not develop. The gas plant provided employment but

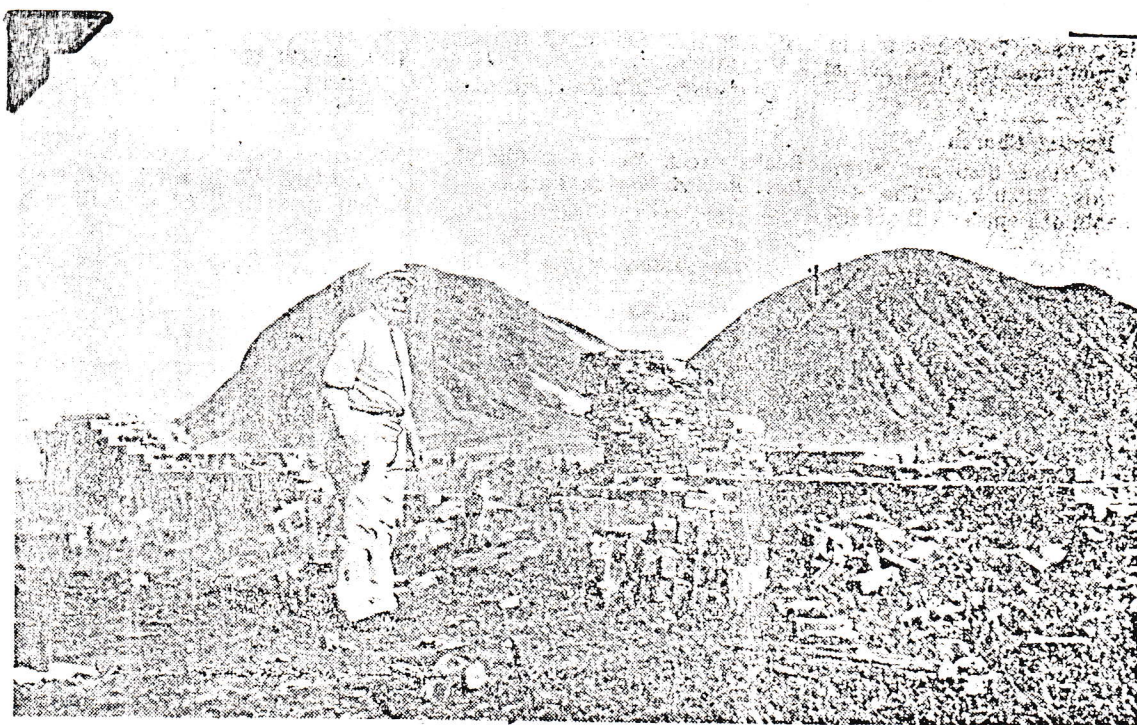
¹ Interview conducted with Mrs. Betty Biava, July 7, 1979.

² Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, (New York: AMS Press, 1967), p. 292.

operated only so long as the coal mine did. The soda pop and candy factories did not do enough out of town business to support themselves or the city once the consuming population of the city declined. And, though the grain elevators were needed by farmers, the nearby communities of Campus and Gabery had elevators that the farmers could utilize just as well. Cardiff's vices had been popular, but only because for twelve years it had been "the fun" place to be. When, however, the miners started to leave and it ceased to be so much fun, the farmers and others who spent money so freely in Cardiff's taverns, dance halls, and hotel, found taverns in other towns to be more entertaining. lastly, the people who settled Cardiff, miners, their families, and fledgling businessmen, were not community builders who would take pride in their community and support it through good times and bad. The majority of them owned little more than they could carry with them from place to place. They rented their home or a room in someone else's home and owed loyalty only to the paycheck they received twice a month. They enjoyed the life they lived in Cardiff, but knew that they could also enjoy life in any other mining town where they had a place to live, good pay and good liquor to consume after they finished a long day in the mine. When the mine closed, therefore, unless a man had an interest in something like farming where he could support himself and not depend upon a company enterprise, there was nothing to hold that man or his family in the city. The company might have even helped him on his way by selling the house he rented out from under him. And why should businessmen stay when their customers were leaving and profits could be made elsewhere. Is it any wonder then that Cardiff sits today in the midst of farmer's fields, hidden almost in the shadows of the slag heaps that mark the mines that gave the city its birth and strangled it when it was down?



MAIN STREET 1964 — Only the Ahern home remains today along the dusty gravel road that was once Cardiff's Main Street. Joe Benetone, whose parents ran a general store in Cardiff during the 1920s, lives today in the Ahern house and farms land lying on the old mine site. — (Leader Photo.)

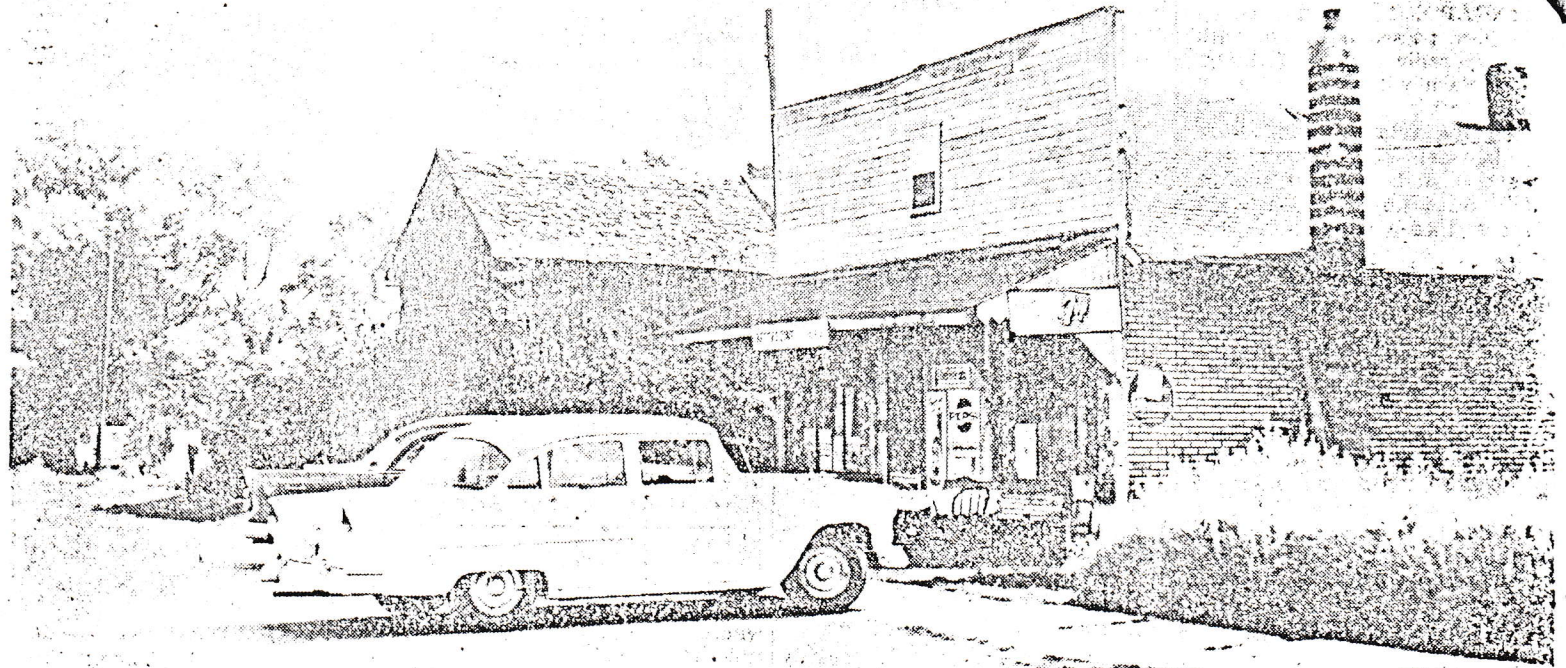


REMEMBERS THE BOOM DAYS—Thomas Tyrrell, shown here beside the remains of a mine building, remembers the days when he operated the mine elevator as company engineer. Today Tyrrell farms the land lying over the site of the old mine. He saw the bustling mining community rise up from nothing in 1901, flourish for 13 years, and rapidly melt away when the mine closed in 1912.—(Leader Photo.)

"Explosion at Cardiff Mine Gives Preview of Final Closing,"
Pontiac Daily Leader, (July 25, 1964), p. 2.



CARDIFF 1964 — A few concrete pilings and footings and tumbled brick foundations are all that remains today to mark the site of the Cardiff mine about a mile-and-one-half northeast of Campus, in Round Grove Township. The hill in the background is the mine slag, formed of residue from the crushing operation. The small tree at the right marks the location of the gaping mine shaft, now filled with water. — (Leader Photo.)



CARDIFF BUSINESS DISTRICT — Today only one store remains to form Cardiff's business district. "Betty's Confectionery", shown here, is operated by Mrs. Betty Biave who moved to Cardiff from Pontiac in 1940. During the boom days of Cardiff around the turn

of the century the town boasted 15 saloons, two dance halls, a bowling alley, two banks, a fine hotel, two baseball teams, and over 2,000 citizens. The population today is 19. — (Leader Photo.)

"Explosion at Cardiff Mine Gives Preview of Final Closing,"
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